DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 394 080 CG 026 864

AUTHOR Evans, Thomas; And Others
TITLE An Inexpensive School/Home Intervention Program To Raise Student Achievement.
PUB DATE 13 Mar 93
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Conference of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (San Pedro Sula, Honduras, March 13, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; Achievement Gains; At Risk Persons; Behavior Modification; Elementary Education; Elementary School Students; Family School Relationship; *Intervention; Parent Attitudes; *Parent Education; *Parent Student Relationship; Prevention; Program Development; Study Skills; Underachievement
IDENTIFIERS Honduras; Iowa Testing Programs

ABSTRACT

A comprehensive strategy targeted to raise student achievement is arguably one of the most important components of any school's vision for improvement. This paper describes a comprehensive intervention program at The San Alejo American School, Honduras (student enrollment: <100). This program was aimed toward raising students' achievement levels while simultaneously preventing their early or continued failure at school. The intervention program had five components: (1) a family-centered study skills workshop; (2) a family-centered reading activities workshop; (3) a school-wide reading campaign; (4) a behavioral modification strategies workshop; and (5) regularly scheduled enrichment sessions between teachers and students in need of additional assistance. Parents were integrally involved in program implementation, and their involvement served as an inexpensive substitute for a high priced intervention program. Additionally, their participation in the program tended to increase parents' sense of ownership for their children's' education, thus providing the program developers with a valuable source of support. This program also led to an improvement in parent-teacher relationships and greater collaboration between teachers. (TS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 394 080

An Inexpensive School/Home Intervention Program

To Raise Student Achievement

Mr. Thomas Evans
Director

Ms. Marta Rivera
Directora Por Ley

Ms. Dawn Schulte
Elementary Teacher

San Alejo American School
San Alejo, Atlantida, Honduras

Paper presented at T.E.S.O.L. Conference
San Pedro Sula, Cultural Center
March 13, 1993

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL
HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

T. EVANS

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CG026864

A comprehensive strategy targeted to raise student achievement is arguably one of the most important components of any school's vision for improvement. At The San Alejo American School, Honduras, we consciously decided to affect greater student achievement, and formulated a long term plan to do so which was implemented this past fall of the 1992-93 school year.

The major stimulus leading us to prioritize student achievement above many other school based concerns was the observation of our students nearly uniform low Iowa test scores from the spring of 1992. Notwithstanding the growing criticism of standardized tests, we interpreted the reported scores as an indication that general academic areas of concern existed. The next step, we decided, would be some immediate form of academic intervention.

We felt both a logical and moral imperative to develop an intervention plan aimed toward raising students' achievement levels, and in effect, raising the school's standards, while simultaneously preventing students' early or continued failure at school. Recently, Warren Simmons (1993) eloquently stated the logic behind raising student achievement during an interview in the February issue of Educational Leadership. He said:

> ...students are held to high standards by someone. If they are not held to high standards by schools, they're certainly going to be held to high standards by employers, by their communities, and so forth. So the idea that educators are doing students a disservice by holding them to high standards is a fallacy (p. 20).

From an ethical standpoint, intervention to prevent school failure for at-risk children is warranted as described by Richard Slavin (1992) in the December issue of Educational

Leadership. He wrote:

> Success in the early grades does not guarantee success throughout the school years and beyond, but failure in the early grades does virtually guarantee failure in later schooling. If there is a chance to prevent the negative spiral that begins with early reading failure from the start, then it seems necessary to do so (pp. 11-12).

Though academic intervention to help underachieving students is both logically and ethically justified, financial implications must also be taken into consideration. Again, as Slavin (1992) wrote again: "The key issue for at-risk students is not *whether* additional costs will be necessary, but *when* they should be provided (p. 13)".

We found ourselves in the frustrating position of having decided to create some form of intervention program, but with minimal financial resources to mobilize as Slavin indicates ought to occur. That is when we decided to turn to our ready reserve of human resources -- the parents. Since parents have a vested interest in their children's learning and are generally available when approached, we decided that their integral involvement could serve as an inexpensive substitute for some high priced, tried and true intervention program. We also expected that parents' sense of ownership for their children's education would increase yielding us valuable support since people generally support what they help create. Our next step was to formulate the components that would comprise the intervention program with special emphasis on the part that parents would play.

The components of the school/parent intervention program were not conceived wholly ahead of its implementation. We added some program parts as deemed necessary while the

process evolved. Therefore, at present, our intervention program designed to utilize parents' help consists of three workshops to motivate parents, a school-wide reading campaign designed in part to engage parents in their children's assignments at home, and extracurricular enrichment sessions for struggling students.

Briefly characterized, the intervention components are as follows. The first workshop titled, **A Family-Centered Study Skills Workshop**, initiated the school/home partnership. In that workshop we provided general advice concerning how parents could assist their children at home. It was timed to coincide with the first fall mid-term progress reports to tap parents' immediate concerns. The second workshop called, **A Family-Centered Reading Activities Workshop**, built upon and advanced our earlier efforts in enlisting parents' help. That workshop focussed specifically on the English language arts and once again we suggested how parents could aid their child's learning at home. This workshop was offered in December and timed to coincide with a school-wide reading campaign whose general purpose was to stimulate children's greater interest and abilities in reading and communication. The third workshop's intent was to involve parents in helping their children at home using behavioral modification techniques to increase the frequency of desired behaviors that aid learning and to decrease the occurrence of behaviors that interfer. Finally, teachers conducted regularly scheduled extracurricular enrichment sessions for children of all grades in need of additional reinforcement of basic skills. These were offered after school for primary students, and in the afternoon for preschool students.

School/Home Intervention Program Components

The following section presents the chronology and details of the individual components making up the school/home intervention program (see Fig. 1).

Figure 1.

Chronology and Components of School/Home Intervention Program

October 1992: **Family-Centered Study Skills Workshop**

1) interpreted Iowa test scores and stated the school's use of them
2) analyzed factors contributing to low scores
3) prioritized increasing student achievement and school standards
4) presented home interventionary monitoring and mentoring examples

December 1992: **Family-Centered Reading Activities Workshop**

1) reaffirmed the priority of mastering English language arts basic skills
2) described active instruction used routinely at school
3) introduced the idea of at home parent/child reading time
4) guided the creation of instructional instruments for home use

December 1992: **School-wide Reading Campaign**

1) designed to promote student interest and abilities in reading and writing
2) provided parents with multiple opportunities to aid child at home

March1993: **Behavioral Modifications Strategies Workshop**

1) discussed basic concepts of behavioral modification
2) analyzed imaginary case scenarios
3) asked parents to identify a behavior of their child to encourage or eliminate
4) planned schedules of reinforcement that parents could implement

Family-Centered Study Skills Workshop

The Family-Centered Study Skills Workshop was given last October of 1992 following the release of the first fall progress reports. Our intent was to defuse parental anxiety that had arisen due to their receipt of the prior spring's Iowa test scores, and to present concrete interventionary monitoring and mentoring examples parents could repeat at home to help their children.

Parents' anxiety concerning their children's low Iowa test results was relieved through an explanation of the school's use of the test scores and an accounting of the factors responsible for low test scores among the majority of students. At The San Alejo American School, we use the Iowa test results to diagnose areas of academic concern, rather than as a guide for grade level advancement. So for us, the Iowa test is a low stakes examination. We also told parents that early elementary students often score significantly lower compared to fifth and sixth grade students, whose extra years of training enable them to function at their respective grade level. We explained that early low scores can mean that each child is on a different learning trajectory and that many have artificial E.S.L. learning conditions imposed upon them as well.

We went on to make the following three points illustrating examples of monitoring and mentoring that parents could duplicate at home to produce observable learning outcomes for their children: 1) Make sure your child knows what, when, where, and how to study. Students achieve this by focussing on ideas specifically emphasized in class and the text; involving as many of the five senses as possible; and studying in a quiet, designated location. 2) Parents can directly assist their child's studying. Parents accomplish this when they ask the child about what he/she is

learning; highlight reinforcing examples of the child's current lessons outside school; monitor the completion of homework using teacher made forms; review for quizzes and tests together; read to the child 15 minutes nightly before bed; and communicate frequently with the classroom teacher. 3) Parents can indirectly assist their child's studying. Parents can do this by showing their child that they complete tasks on time (such as paying bills), work best without distractions, and seek help from others as needed.

The feedback we received was encouraging. Various parents reported a general sense that we really cared about their children's welfare. They expressed a perception of us as extending ourselves in an attempt to create a viable partnership, rather than serving as judges to pronounce blame upon their children for their academic shortcomings. We believe that parents began to understand that their children's success will be determined at our school through the teachers, students, and parents continuous collective effort at making and maintaining standards, not by a ritualistic annual tracking of achievement measures reported on the Iowa tests (Evans, 1992).

Family-Centered Reading Activities Workshop

The second of three workshops comprising our school/home intervention program was titled, A Family-Centered Reading Activities Workshop. This workshop was offered in December of 1992, timed to coincide with the start of a school-wide reading campaign (detailed below).

We rationalized offering this workshop focussed specifically on reading skills based on two beliefs. The first belief centered upon a strongly felt imperative to intervene to help

underachieving children in order to at least forestall early feelings of failure that inhibit later success. We had taken Slavin's (1992) earlier thoughts to heart regarding the immense impact of failure during a child's early school years.

The other belief rationalizing our reading workshop was our strong acceptance of the assumption that greater success in the English language arts will transfer to other subjects likewise contributing to increased success. Therefore, during the reading workshop we described for parents numerous examples of our active approach toward teaching the English language arts, we introduced them to the notion of at-home parent and child reading time, and we asked them to create instructional instruments that they could take home for immediate use with their children.

Our approach to teaching the basic skills is to make instruction as active a process as possible. For example, our preschool classroom instruction is characterized by a high level of verbal interaction. The teacher is constantly initiating commands, posing questions, leading songs, and inventing games to engage students in the learning process. Much verbal, and to a lesser extent, written repetition and review of shapes, numbers, and colors are other characteristics of our preschool instruction. The students also engage in drama through large amounts of role playing so that their thoughts and desires are verbalized in impressionable contexts aiding them to learn more and faster.

The first and second grade students have become increasingly communicative in speech and writing due to the teacher's constant checking, via oral and written means, of students' understanding. The teacher spends large amounts of time discussing new vocabulary words and subject matter concepts followed by writing assignments specifically designed to relate the new

meanings to the child's real life thereby achieving greater relevancy and increasing the probability of retention.

Several activities have proven quite successful in improving the literacy level among the first and second graders. Picture stories have been a regular staple varying in the teacher's assistance level from dictation to complete "hands-off". An enhancing follow-up to the picture stories has been to eliminate from these stories words within the child's reading vocabulary, instead substituting picture clues which the student must replace with the initial correct word. Students have also enjoyed matching pictures they have drawn of vocabulary words with the one correct of three phrases best describing the word that the teacher had written on the blackboard. Reading strips of papers displaying phrase groups has helped students read smoother, quicker, and with greater comprehension as the teacher encourages them to abandon a familiar E.S.L. one-word-at-a-time reading approach. As a challenge, students are asked to recall displayed word phrases after a four second or more wait period. Lastly, students enjoy composing and reading stories stimulated by interesting action or mood pictures. Students subsequently cut apart the stories by lines and fasten them to the back of the picture for future convenient and enjoyable resequencing.

Our third through fifth graders have been encouraged to read and write through various strategies, and have responded well to two approaches in particular. In one exercise, the students are given daily journal topics upon which they write brief paragraphs. The classroom teacher also maintains a message bulletin board upon which students are free to place notes posing questions for her that she, in turn, responds to in writing. The observable evolution of students' writing

ability made possible by the artifactual material produced through these two writing activities provides evidence of significant academic progress. Lastly, these grades were challenged to read 1,000 pages each in a three month time period while the teacher charted their cumulative progress on a thermometer poster as a visual aid. The students lived up to the challenge and as a result, we believe, are better readers now being well motivated to continue reading on their own for information and pleasure.

Examples of active instruction were in plentiful abundance when teachers involved the entire student body in a school-wide reading campaign. Its general nature was a series of activities designed to promote long term appreciation for and improved abilities in reading and communication.

Another key objective of the reading workshop was to encourage parents' active interest in reading more with their children at home, so we introduced them to a session of modeled parent/child reading time and later discussed the potential benefits that parents may derive from it. The modeled reading time session was displayed by a video prepared by Scholastic Publishing Company, though a teacher and a volunteer student would have little trouble reproducing the same interactions live before the parents. In addition to the numerous instructional strategies to which shared reading time lends itself (e.g., checking a child's abilities to anticipate, sequence, and critique a story's plot and characters), parents were surprised to discover that reading together is an often overlooked easy means by which they can improve their relationship with their child.

To increase the probability that parents would transfer the ideas suggested concerning

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

shared reading time, we asked them to create inexpensive instructional instruments that they could assemble rapidly and take home for immediate use with their children. Examples of these instructional instruments and their uses include the following:

1) **matchable cut-outs** that pair question stems with answers which can be used in vocabulary building, phonics, and math drills.
2) **picture puzzles** that need recombining in a proper order which can be used for teaching sequential logic, noting detail, and math equations.
3) **vocabulary strips & a displayer** that show vocabulary words one at a time which can be used for vocabulary building and teaching related words.
4) **flash cards** for use in drilling colors, numbers, A-B-C s, and vocabulary definitions.
5) **sensory poems** that contain sensory images that listeners can identify for the reader such as certain colors mentioned.

During the several weeks following this reading workshop, we heard comments from various parents who used some of these instructional instruments with their children. For example, parents of preschool children used flash cards to review the colors, letter identification, and numbers up to ten; parents of first and second graders used the vocabulary strips to practice spelling and reading words; and parents of fourth graders used flash cards to drill math concepts. Parents of fifth graders reported reading more at night to their children.

School-Wide Reading Campaign

We initiated a school-wide reading campaign in December concurrent with the reading workshop just described. In this way, teachers exposed students throughout the entire school to many English language arts activities during the day in which their parents could involve

themselves after school.

The reading campaign had multiple purposes. Specifically, we wanted children to simply learn to enjoy literature more and thereby become life-long readers, to become more effective communicators, to develop their abilities to think creatively and critically, to increase their abilities in the language arts, and transfer that success to other subjects.

In pursuit of these goals, we developed our own or adapted published language arts activities that could involve the entire school body. These activities included a mix of reading and writing experiences that spanned all grades with appropriate modifications for age and ability. Teachers also structured the activities to involve students between different grades for the sake of student interaction of markedly different maturity levels. With varying amounts of success, we attempted all of the following language arts activities:

1) **Young authors**: where students wrote their own books, plays, and poems. Older students stories displayed elements of literature such as setting, plot, and characters; and were created through a standard process of pre-writing, editing, revision, and sharing. Younger students were encouraged to write book logs for library books in which they specified the title, author, illustrator, main idea, and reasons why they liked the book.
2) **Make Reading A Special Thing Area**: resulted in the designation of a small bench at school where only reading was permitted. This was an incentive to those predisposed to read already and an encouraging visual reminder to those a bit less inclined to read on their own.
3) **Read-Along-And Along**: was an activity in which students took turns adding a sentence strip to a story starter that stretched down the hallway to the next classroom. The exercise concluded when the whole school had been involved (Alexander, 1991).
4) **Reading Buddies**: was an activity during convenient classtime in which older students practiced their reading by doing so for groups of younger children approximately twenty minutes daily. The older students became more competent and confident readers and speakers through this enjoyable experience, and the younger students developed a greater appreciation for reading and story telling

by seeing possible mentors doing it.

5) **Drop Everything And Read Time (D.E.A.R. Time)**: was a daily time designated for independent or group leisure reading.
6) **Language Arts And Crafts**: was an activity in which students designed dust jackets out of kraft paper for books they had recently read and/or reported on.
7) **Help These Characters Come Alive**: engaged students to make dolls and masks from material scraps to depict their favorite book characters and displayed them upon a bulletin board titled, "Help These Characters Come Alive, -- READ (Kay, 1989 cited in Alexander, 1991)!"
8) **Product Commercials**: required students to plan commercials by preparing scripts, props, and music highlighting an imaginary product of theirs.
9) **Drama**: for which younger students used finger puppets to act out stories they had created.

We feel confident in claiming that to date we have observed many benefits induced by this reading campaign, the study skills workshop, and the reading activities workshop. Probably the first positive effect observed was an increase in the frequency of student requests to visit the library and of their more appropriate behavior once in the library. Among the older students we have seen a general increase in their reading ability, and in some cases a dramatic leap. The older students have expressed positive comments about their feelings toward reading and writing, indicating a certain pride in their accomplishments. The preschool children have demonstrated more enthusiasm for "reading", that is, handling and looking at books when given free time to choose their toys. There is general hope on our part that the sooner the students master more of the basic skills, the more enabled they will be to use the variety of U.S. curricular material we have for their appropriate grade level. Finally, during parent/teacher conferences parents have mentioned that they believe they can see the growth in their children's knowledge acquisition as reflected school holiday programs and in the quality and quantity of assignments assembled into student portfolios from one marking period to the next.

Behavioral Modification Strategies Workshop

We offered the third in a series of three parent workshops in March of 1993called A Behavioral Modification Strategies Workshop. It focussed on offering parents an introductory understanding of basic behavioral modifications concepts such as positive and negative reinforcement, extinguishing a behavior, schedules of reinforcement, and a token system of reward. A number of activities followed that required parents to use these concepts in imaginary scenarios. Next, we mentioned successful ways in which teachers have used behavior modification to reduce the frequency of disruptive classroom behaviors by certain individuals. Confident of the trust that we had built over the course of this school year among the parents, we eventually asked them to specify a behavior of their child that they would like to encourage or eliminate, and to plan a realistic schedule of reinforcement that they could implement.

The benefits for students that we hope to see in time is their increased attention to their schoolwork especially during classtime which should result in a reduction of work unnecessarily take home. Through the elimination of disruptive or nonproductive behavior, we expect that the child and teacher will advance further along into a more productive nurturing relationship.

Parent reactions to the behavior modification workshop was favorable and insightful. A couple of parents jokingly expressed relief in knowing that there was still one more untried means by which some behavioral change in their son or daughter could be affected. Other parents mentioned a heightened feeling of confidence concerning their ability to actively assist their children's learning at home. Lastly, various parents stated that they felt a stronger sense of

empathy for the tasks of their child's teacher, and now trust his or her professional decisions more.

Extracurricular Enrichment Sessions

The final component comprising our intervention program is called Extracurricular Enrichment Sessions. Enrichment sessions are regularly scheduled meetings between teachers and particular students of all grades in need of additional assistance in strengthening their basic skills and currently learned lessons. Prioritized by need and formalized through appointments, primary students meet after school for an average of three and a half hours per week, while preschool students meet in the afternoon for approximately three hours per week.

Enrichment sessions are teacher guided gatherings of small numbers of students enabling greater direct attention to each. The sequential steps used to solve math computations, for example, or students' methods of constructing meaning of subject matter studied can be checked by the teacher in these sessions.

In small groups, students of similar abilities have displayed more willingness to interact with their teacher and troublesome subject matter. Teachers have also observed gains in confidence for the attending students as they tend to participate more in their regular classes. At their inception, primary students seemed to regard enrichment sessions as akin to taking bad tasting medicine. Now, a club-like feeling exists as students anticipate their special time to share with their teacher.

Conclusion

At The San Alejo American School, we felt a logical and moral imperative to intervene to stave off early school failure for at-risk students whom we informally identified as having earned low Iowa test scores the prior spring and who were reconfirmed through teacher observations to be lacking particular basic skills. The implementation of an academic intervention program had been decided, though we could not rely on large financial support to fund the enterprise. So we turned to the parent body as our reserve of ready, willing, able, and inexpensive human resources to substitute for scarce financial resources. Furthermore, we believed that parents' increased feeling of ownership in their children's education would translate into valuable support for our program helping to ensure its success.

Parents' response to the whole intervention program was overwhelmingly positive. We experienced large turnouts for all three workshops with spirited, probing discussions. Parent attendance at school programs increased as well. We heard many comments by parents indicating their own and their child's satisfaction with the schoo"s program focussed primarily on teaching the basic skills. And parents have stated that they have a greater understanding of, and therefore more confidence in, the instructional decisions and criteria of their child's teacher.

The effects of this intervention program on teachers were highly positive. Teachers' professional credibility soared in the parents' eyes as they repeatedly demonstrated their professional knowledge through the workshops offered and their dedication through an obvious willingness to "do what it takes" to see student achievement scores rise. Another favorable by-

product of this intervention program was the collaborative atmosphere created among the teachers as we struggled to increase the amount of learning taking place, and thereby raise our school's academic standards, too. In this attempt, we "talked shop" constantly at school, passing along tips on successful techniques to teach particular lessons, discussing ideas presented in current journals, and sharing ideas proven effective at former schools. We believe that our efforts have already made observable positive impacts toward increasing the amount of student learning taking place this school year. We view our parent intervention program as cyclical as opposed to linear in nature, and therefore have begun plans for a May Pre-Kindergarten through first grade school readiness workshop during which parents will hear ways that they can help their children over the summer to properly prepare themselves socially, academically, and emotionally for their transition to new grades.

To restate the important point just made, this year's school/home intervention program has undoubtably produced very positive results among the students. The demonstration of their language arts abilities has increased in quantity and quality as they project a more willing attitude to do their school assignments. They are more respectful of teachers as adult mediators of special activities in their daily lives and of the school in general as a place for learning. Students also exhibit greater interest in caring for their school material and appear genuinely happy as they initiate more free time interactions with their teachers and simply laugh more.

Before closing, it seems only appropriate to mention specific factors that may affect the implementation of our school/home intervention program in other schools. The San Alejo American School has a student enrollment under 100, so any attempt at school-wide program

implementation will be more manageable at our school than at a larger school. We are a new school (in our third year), therefore institutional customs and procedures are not so embedded as to hinder the chances of implementing a new, creative idea. Our school is organized into classrooms containing multiple grades, thus a certain "homey" feeling already exists among the students and their parents which predisposes parents to desire an active role in school matters. Lastly, we are located in a rural setting which elicits from people living there a self-reliant attitude that we must somehow come to terms with problems and solve them ourselves.

Nevertheless, we encourage any school thinking about raising school-wide student achievement, and consequently school standards too, to consider our example and tap the parent body for inexpensive assistance and valuable support by involving them in the process. At too many schools, their potential services are customarily overlooked or imprudently dismissed based on fears of intrusion. Perhaps in these cost conscious days, it would serve schools better if they took a second look at their great reserve of human resources available for mobilization usually just for the price of asking.

References

Alexander, R., (1991). Top Notch 2 Teacher Tips, Scholastic Professional Books, New York: New York.

Evans, T. J. (1992). Softening the blows, The International Educator, VII (2), 18.

Simmons, W., and Resnick, L., (1993). Assessment as the catalyst of school reform, Educational Leadership, 50, (5), 11-15.

Slavin, R. E., Karweit, N. L., and Wasik, B.A., (1993). Preventing school failure: What works? Educational Leadership, 50, (2), 10-17.